

Probation Policy

1. Introduction

In accordance with the Terms and Conditions of Service, offers of appointment to external candidates will be made subject to an initial probationary period, except in exceptional circumstances. The following document details the probationary periods which apply to each staff category, and the process for confirmation/non-confirmation of probation.

2. Aim

The purpose of the probationary policy is to provide a clear framework for assessing a new employee's capability, reliability and suitability in respect of a role.

The policy aims to ensure an effective probationary process is undertaken for all employees that will include provision for induction, training and performance review during the probationary period, and to ensure that all staff are given the support and the opportunity to maximise their potential and to achieve success in carrying out their duties to the required standard.

3. Probationary Periods

For Academic Staff, any offer of permanent or fixed-term appointment will normally be subject to an initial probationary period of 4 years, unless exceptionally where a candidate's experience and research warrant this, by agreement of the Group People Director, this condition is waived or the period is reduced in the letter of appointment. In the case of a fixed-term appointment of less than 4 years, the probationary period will apply to the initial contract, and any subsequent renewal or appointment to a permanent post, subject to the overall maximum probationary period of 4 years.

For Research Staff and Academic-Related Staff, any offer of appointment will be made subject to an initial probationary period specified in the letter of appointment. In no case shall this probationary period be less than three months or exceed one year (except where an extension to the probationary period is made, in which case the maximum probationary period of 18 months will apply).

For Support Staff, all offers of first appointment are subject to an initial probationary period. In the case of trainees, the period will be six months; in all other cases it will be a minimum of three months and a maximum of six months (including any extension).

For Associate Lecturer Staff, any offer of appointment may be made subject to an initial probationary period of 2 years. Where an extension in the probationary period is made, the maximum probationary period will be 3 years.

Regardless of their category, staff who have successfully completed a probationary period will not be asked to complete another probationary period if they are appointed to another role on the same Terms and Conditions. Where appointment is to a different category of staff, a probationary period is optional.

4. Final Probation Review

At the end of the probationary period, or before if the Head of Unit (or University Secretary, if appropriate) is satisfied that the purposes of probation have been satisfied, the appointment of the staff member may be confirmed in writing.

For Academic, Academic-Related, Associate Lecturer and Research Staff, if it is proposed that the appointment of the staff member should not be confirmed, a Probation Committee shall be convened to consider the written reports made on the staff member and interview them. They may then confirm the appointment, defer or extend the probationary period, or give notice to terminate the appointment.

For Support Staff, if it is proposed that the appointment of the staff member should not be confirmed, the Head of Unit will extend the probationary period, or give notice to terminate the appointment.

5. Extension of Probation

For Academic staff, an extension of 12 months may be made, subject to the overall maximum probationary period of 4 years. For Research or Academic-Related staff, the overall maximum probationary period, including any extension, is 18 months. For Support staff, the overall maximum probationary period is 6 months. For Associate Lecturer staff, an extension of 12 months may be made, subject to the overall maximum probationary period of 3 years.

Where the probationary period is extended, a further review will be undertaken prior to the end of the extension.

6. Non-confirmation of Probation

Where it is decided that the probationary period is not to be confirmed, payment in lieu of notice may be given, or notice in accordance with terms and conditions of service.

7. Responsibility of Managers

It is the responsibility of line managers to ensure that the work of the staff member is carefully and continually monitored throughout the probationary period. Performance against their objectives should be reviewed regularly with the staff member.

The appointment will be automatically confirmed by default if written notice of an extension or termination is not sent to the individual prior to the probation expiry date. If the appointment is not to be confirmed, it is the responsibility of the line manager to sign off the Probationary Report on the system and notify the People Hub before the final probation review date, in order that the member of staff can be notified and, where necessary, a Committee convened to consider the probation.

8. Equality, diversity and inclusion

Policies are inclusive of all Open University staff, regardless of: race, sex, disability, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression or gender reassignment.

9. Useful References

Probation Procedures

Probationary Report Form

Terms and Conditions – Academic Related

Staff Terms and Conditions – Academic Staff

Terms and Conditions – Support Staff

Terms and Conditions– Full Time Research Staff

Terms and Conditions – Associate Lecturer Staff